

Center Stage Theater
751 Paseo Nuevo
Santa Barbara, California

"Hopeless Romantic"

A Play

by

Steven Kunes

Producer:

Theodore J. Sennes
Sam Stern

Starring:

Edward Giron
Meredith McMinn

Revised Draft

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This play is dedicated to my son

Nathaniel

And to his beautiful bride

Natalie

May they live happily-ever-after!

Characters:

The Man: Michael Hanley, 62, the novelist.

The Woman: Beth Summerland, 56, the columnist.

Setting:

Small waiting area.
Santa Barbara Airport.
Santa Barbara, California.

Author's Note:

The man and the woman are alone in the waiting area.

There is a deliberate absence of stage directions.

Similarly (except in the final scene) the necessary silences and pauses are not indicated in the text.

Also (except in the final scene) each character speaks in the form of monologue.

"Hopeless Romantic"

1-A. THE MAN:

Bitter.

My friend says I'm bitter.

Maybe he's right. Lately, food has tasted bitter, and when I look at the ocean, even that feels bitter.

My old friend Richard Carrigan says I'm bitter.

Carrigan with his forty-year-old Japanese girlfriend says I'm bitter.

Carrigan who used to suffer from insomnia has found a cure and now can sleep.

Lately, when I can't sleep, I think of Carrigan and his little geisha.

Carrigan who wants to write my biography.

Absolutely not! I don't care how many years we've known each other, there's absolutely no question of a biography. Not now, and not after I'm dead. That's what I have to tell my lawyer.

The biography of a writer -- ridiculous.

Who knows the first thing about anybody's life?

Did I write what I wanted to write? Never. I wrote what I was capable of writing, not what I wanted to.

All you ever do is what you're capable of.

How can your complete works, your contribution added to the world, amount to anything more than a mishmash of approximations?

Isn't the end result inevitable failure?

Hemingway said that novels aren't completed, they're abandoned. So the only thing left to discuss are intentions.

All those idiots discussing their intentions.

Shoveling out opinions, not one of them who will admit the whole thing's slipped away, the material's uncontrollable, I can't remember the original idea, and all that's left is what came limping into port.

All those idiots who turn up on book programs!

And you're not one of them, I suppose?

No.

Oh, really?

I've never appeared on a book program. Never so much as gone near one.

Fine. You've done other things, then. Lectures. Interviews, God knows how many! And innumerable functions in your honor.

Barbara Walters!

Yes, Barbara Walters, who makes it a point to mention every famous person she knows during an interview, as if the person she's interviewing isn't interesting enough.

Barbara Walters would be far happier interviewing herself.

Well then, there's Richard Carrigan.

No, his is not a book program, it's a Writer's Conference, and I don't speak at any event.

I circulate.

I circulate so my old friend Carrigan can get laid.

Because I'm his friend, they sleep with him.

That's the closest they can get to Michael Hanley.

Opening their legs for his old friend, Richard Carrigan.

Carrigan says he knows what my sex life is like by the way his students screw him when I'm in town.

I've asked him to describe a few of his encounters to see if I'm up to par. He confessed that for a while the intensity of his sex life had waned, but with this new book all is back to its ecstatic norm.

My novels must be well-received in Tokyo.

How odd it is to have another human being step into the sex life I have yet to have.

My agent takes ten percent.

Perhaps Richard Carrigan should be charged some sort of fee.

He says she listens to him.

Everything comes from overseas now.

Including Carrigan's new girlfriend.

Why write novels when I can hang out with you and get girls, he says. Isn't that why anyone writes a novel in the first place? To get laid?

Carrigan may be on to something.

My son would never write a book. He told me that when he was eight, and his mind hasn't changed. Now he's twenty-seven he insists that it's computer engineers that get laid.

Far more than novelists, he says.

Jeffrey's girlfriend is from Ecuador. Quito, Ecuador. I call her chick-Quito. Not to her face, of course. Jeffrey orders for her at restaurants. She likes when he does this. Linda feels secure when Jeffrey places both their orders.

They are cute together, Jeffrey and Linda. She is petite. She reminds me of a martini olive. My computer engineer son is in love with a martini olive. I love Jeffrey very much.

Jeffrey loves Linda.

Therefore, I love Linda Contreras. A Spanish martini olive. And a speech teacher as well.

Carrigan and Jeffrey have never met. I think I'll keep it that way.

I'll call my son from the air. Perhaps he and martini olive will meet me for a late dinner at Tadish's. Or somewhere on the Wharf, God forbid.

Assuming I ever leave Santa Barbara. Once Oprah moved here, the planes take much longer to leave.

A smart woman not afraid to speak her mind. One who orders her own food.

"Hopeless Romantic."

1-B. THE WOMAN:

There's nothing quite as interesting as the art one finds hanging on the wall of an airport waiting area.

A painting from another time and place.

A commuter train in San Luis Obispo in...1953, perhaps.

There's a man sitting by the window, looking out.

He has a high forehead, his eyes are sad, he's about sixty --

He's holding his hand in front of his mouth in an attitude of contemplation which conceals half his face. Outside, there's a woman standing on the platform, with her hands in her pockets, watching the train go by. Behind her is a Christmas tree.

In the positions in which they find themselves, you could imagine that the two are looking at each other, however briefly.

The encounter has no effect on either of them.

What is it that they're both looking at? The familiar course of time.

Time taking its familiar course.

If what happens happens purely by chance, there'd be no reason to dwell on this image.

My godmother Virginia is dead.

The world I'm looking at is a world in which my godmother Virginia no longer exists.

In her room at the hospital, in a drawer, there was a photograph of me as a little girl.

I'd given it to Virginia shortly after we met, when we decided to adopt one another.

At forty-four, I got to have a godmother. For eight years, I got to have Virginia Cherrill as my godmother. Virginia Cherrill who played the flower girl in "City Lights" -- with Charlie Chaplin -- was now my godmother.

Virginia Cherrill who was once married to Cary Grant was now my godmother.

Does this mean Cary Grant was my godfather?

I'll have to ask him someday.

She said she kept my photograph in her room at the hospital for "protection." She'd told that to the nurse. She was seventy-six.

A woman who'd been in positions of authority all her life, a woman who'd known kings and queens and was a friend to Winston Churchill, a woman you could say was quite worldly, a doting aunt, and she'd brought a

photograph of me with her, to keep in a drawer in her bedside table.

What would Virginia Cherrill do now?

She'd just do it.

I ought to do it.

But I don't dare.

Beth Summerland who was not afraid to walk right up to Sean Connery on Fifth Avenue, is unable to seize the moment she's waited for for thirty years.

What's it matter anyhow?

It matters.

I can't just sit here in silence, between now and the time our planes take off, and start reading "Hopeless Romantic."

If I take "Hopeless Romantic" from my handbag, I'll have to lean towards him and say, excuse me, Mr.

Hanley, it just so happens I'm in the middle of reading "Hopeless Romantic," and naturally I wouldn't be so insensitive as to read it in front of you --

He'll acknowledge me politely with a little smile.

And any conversation from that point on will be impossible, because that's the stupidest thing you could say.

Were I ever to marry, I'd always wanted to write a book called "The World's Oldest Living Bride." Virginia used to laugh every time I mentioned it.

No, I won't mention it to you.

What should I mention to you, Mr. Hanley?

What is it you wish to hear?

2-A. THE MAN:

I'm through.

I won't write another novel.

"Hopeless Romantic" will be my last.

There's just so much a person can write about love.

Thirty-four years of writing about love.

That's what I need. To be in love.

Carrigan will be in Alaska tomorrow.

Gone off with his geisha on an Alaskan cruise to recover from the Writer's Conference.

The sort of trip you make when you've been round the world thirty-six times, you're in the twilight of your life, and what's left to you?

Ice. Ice and schtupping.

That's fine. Tonight I'll have dinner with Jeffrey and martini olive. Perhaps I'll let him order for me.

Of course if my son decides to marry this girl, everything will change.

It won't be just us anymore.

No more dynamic duo.

I'll have to find a new dinner companion.

I'll have to find somebody new with whom to play the pasta game.

My son's game. The game Jeffrey created when he was seven-years-old.

People as pasta.

We were watching Mickey Rooney on television, in "Boy's Town," when Jeffrey said, "macaroni."

I started to dish up another serving of macaroni, our favorite meal, when he pointed to the TV.

"Macaroni," he said. "That kid is a macaroni."

Since then, everyone my son and I come across has been paired up with a noodle.

This happens during all of our restaurant outings.

We'll be in the middle of a meal and somebody will walk by, and one of us will name the type of pasta which best matches that person.

We've done this for twenty years.

Then we'll continue with our meal. Business as usual.

A good people-as-pasta call must encapsulate a person's overall effect on the world.

It must incorporate physical appearance, of course, with personality, mannerisms, speech patterns, demeanor and what-not.

Jeffrey has made some brilliant calls over the years.

Jodie Foster is also a macaroni, while Sophia Loren is a lasagna.

Queen Elizabeth is a linguini.

Prince Charles, on the other hand, is a corkscrew.

Noel Coward, of course, is a bow-tie.

Pavarotti, God rest his soul, is a rigatoni.

One night, it was quite late as I recall, I was watching an old John Wayne movie on A&E, when the telephone rang.

It was my son.

"Are you watching that stuffed shell on TV," he asked.

Present company, however, is always accepted and exempt from classification as pasta.

Behind his back, of course, I see my son Jeffrey as fettuccine.

God only knows how he envisions his old man.

A ravioli?

No. That's Marlon Brando.

We made a pact some years back that Clint Eastwood has a monopoly on spaghetti, the thick kind, not the angel hair -- that's Gwyneth Paltrow.

I'm somewhat chewy...perhaps mostocolli.

Forget the Wharf. We'll go to Tadish's for a T-bone.

I'll have to keep my martini olive thoughts to myself.

Jeffrey doesn't make pasta calls when he's with Linda.

He must be in love.

Could be the end of an era.

A very good, twenty-year pasta run.

2-B. THE WOMAN:

My godmother Virginia didn't like your books.

It was our only quarrel.

She didn't like your short sentences, your repetitions.

She blamed you for your world view.

Very negative, she used to say.

No, not all negative.

I've never thought you were negative, Mr. Hanley, quite the contrary.

I've always found you to inspire hope in all things.

All the same, what a coincidence! What a coincidence to find you sitting next to me in this airport.

Virginia, who didn't like your books and didn't like what she saw of you behind your books, said that your great stroke of luck was to have known how to make yourself loveable to me.

She said that whenever she read you, she was searching for that invisible quality which made me love you.

In the same way, I, not that I'd ever tell you this, I listened over and over again to that piece by Keith Jarrett you're always talking about.

I think what attracted me towards you in the first place was your -- I was going to say your love but that's not the word, no, that's not the word at all -- your "nearness" to music, your "bond" with music, as if the key or the lack of a key to everything was to be found there.

As if music was the thing in the world most lacking from the world.

And that's what you were really searching for, since you wanted no "date with eternity" as such.

3-A. THE MAN:

People ask why I haven't written more. Only six novels in all these years. I have the world's slowest typist, that's why.

Maxine Matthews can't type, can't spell, can't proofread. But she's been my secretary for thirty-four years, which makes her absolutely irreplaceable.

Jeffrey says everyone else has a normal secretary and you have Maxine.

Maxine who is nearly eighty and half-blind. Maxine who refuses to retire.

Yes, I have Maxine.

I trust Maxine.

Maxine tells me I should fall in love or I'll wind up a bitter old man.

I wasn't a bitter writer. No, I never wrote with bitterness.

But I definitely won't write anymore.

"Hopeless Romantic" will be my last.

"Hopeless Romantic," a clean book, straight up and down -- the man I still hope to become.

3-B. THE WOMAN:

My desires have always outstripped whatever actually happened.

Nothing ever lives up to desire.

And you see, I can't understand why it is we're capable of desiring so much when in the end we feel so little.

Why is desire so extravagant compared to what actually happens?

You talked about this, Mr. Hanley, in "The Last Room in Town," where you're troubled about God and afraid that just like the things you have experienced, when in fact you do get to heaven, God himself might not live up to your desire --

Okay. Let's come down to earth, dear, pretentious Mr. Hanley. Would you live up to my desire?

You with your highly polished shoes, your aristocratic fingernails, your renaissance face, your mid-century elegance.

Hmmm. I suspect I'd have to say yes.

My godmother did not see my attraction to you at all.

Could I take out "Hopeless Romantic" and not say a word?

Yes, I could read without raising my eyes, occasionally looking up at the screen to make sure my flight is leaving on time.

I've spent my whole life with you, Mr. Hanley.

That is to say, I've spent the most important years of my life with you.

Which, all the same, means I've spent my life with you, because to arrive as close to you as I feel I have, I first had to reach the age I am and experience everything in the way I've experienced and understood it.

To be able to follow you down your road to what looks like excess, I've had to practice all my life.

This is what I think.

You manufacture yourself, you shape the raw material, then you lay it open to the world.

For a long time I've been attracted to people who are tormented by non-stop suffering.

It seemed to me that the desperate were the only profound, the only really attractive people.

Fundamentally, if I'm honest, I thought them superior. For a long time I felt myself to be less interesting, not to say less admirable, because I loved life.

Until I had some...setbacks, shall we say.

You, on the other hand, claim not to love anything, you complain about everything, but in your rage and in your energy I see life itself.

And, not wishing to infuriate you, I also see joy.

I talk to you secretly.

In my living room, in my bed, in my little home in Denver, I talk to you.

Secretly, I tell you everything I can never tell you.

How to approach you now, at these respective stages of our lives, and say something appropriate. Something that won't embarrass either of us. Something that's not awkward.

Yes, I could read without saying a word.

Are you even going to notice?

Have you even looked my way?

Since we've been seated in this waiting area, have you raised your eyes in my direction a single time?

When I'm not facing towards you, I feel as if you're watching me, but when I decide to connect with you silently, you're somewhere else.

4-A. THE MAN:

On top of everything else, I seem to have lost my number one fan.

Gene Lees hasn't the time to discuss me or my work.

Gene Lees, whom I've known since age six, who sells snow blowers in Binghamton, New York, says my work "feels old."

That I'm repeating myself.

That I'm no longer original.

That's what he said about "Hopeless Romantic." He detested it. Where's the hope, he says.

I hope to never see him again!

I'm repeating myself. So?

I'm repeating myself. Yes. Of course I'm repeating myself. That's what I do. What else is there to do? In fact, Mr. Snow Blower, you didn't even use the phrase "repeat yourself." If you'd said "Michael, you're repeating yourself," I would have sensed some small degree of pleasant familiarity in the "you're repeating yourself" part. I would have discerned the affection, the affectionate bluntness of an old, dear friend.

But what you did say, so embarrassed that you were squirming around like a teenage girl, was "it's very like, it's very like things you've written before." Things I've written before which you adored, Gene Lees! Except now there's been a change of idol.

What you adored, you adored when it was new, "undissected," on the fringes of fashion.

Not original, but new.

I emphasize new, and not original. Two diametrically opposed concepts.

Could he perhaps mean stale?

Or worse...tired?

Let's face it, when it comes down to it, you've never experienced what you extoll most in your books.

You've never experienced unconditional love.

With Jeffrey, yes, of course. He's your son.

But how about with a woman?

The novelty of falling crazy, head-over-heels in love, just like that?

At my age? That would be new...

What are you saying that's new?

Who's your new idol, Gene Lees?

Who's your new idol?

4-B. THE WOMAN:

You're a man with whom I'd like to have discussed certain things.

I, who was so biased in favor of men, ended up turning my back on their friendships.

My best friends, my few rare and singular friends, are now women.

That women would turn out to be better friends to me than men is a development I could never have predicted. You can thank John Benedict for that.

Dr. John Benedict was a dentist, and he told me he was slightly in love with me.

In that charming way men have of being slightly in love with you.

We dated for two years, during which time I had very clean teeth.

Two, sometimes three times a week, we would meet for dinner, then return to his place and watch a movie on TV.

We made love, yes, but not every time. John and I were "comfortable" together. I laughed a great deal with John.

It was a long time since I had laughed.

Almost ten years as a matter of fact.

I'd dated rarely and John was a welcome relief.

By the way, I've often laughed in your company, Mr. Hanley.

So one day, John Benedict arrived with a woman.

He thought it acceptable to bring a woman with him to our lunch date. Her name was Valerie, and she was one of his patients.

The next day, John calls me on the phone and asks, "Would you and I still be friends if I married someone else?"

I was dumbfounded.

Then, John tells me how much I'd like Valerie and how well he thought we'd get along.

He commits the sin of comparing us.

And worse, he begins to ask for my advice!

I was very civilized about it.

To have often been civilized about things is perhaps where I've gone wrong in life.

John married the woman and they had a child.

Jeramy.

We would still have lunch occasionally. Both pretending, in a way, we'd never been anything more than casual friends.

But, getting back to that day when John showed up to our lunch date with Valerie.

That evening, I opened your novel, "The Bicycle Approach," to the page where the woman, Abigail, asks a man out on a date, a man she's liked for some time.

I take opening to that very page as an omen, as a message from my favorite author to not be afraid to "go back out there."

So, the very next day, I ask a man I'd admired for some time to dinner.

And he said yes! Gordon Ukovich, the stockbroker, accepts my invitation!

We seemed to hit it off nicely, Mr. Hanley.

But then here comes this part -- after a dozen or so outings -- dinners, a concert, a few long walks -- we end up at my house. I have a small house down the street from a grammar school.

I'd invited Gordon Ukovich, the stockbroker, to dinner.

He brought with him a bottle of Pinot Grigio and we drank it as I cooked angel hair pasta with fresh

tomatoes and basil from my garden. I write a garden column for the Denver Post.

Dinner was wonderful and, well, after helping me clear the dishes, Gordon Ukovich takes out a compact disc and places it in the stereo.

We dance for two hours in the living room.

We make out like teenagers during "Blueberry Hill."

Gordon leads me to the bedroom and we take off each other's clothing. It had been years for me.

Just like in "The Bicycle Approach." Just like Abigail. Of course I thought of you, Mr. Hanley. I thought, Michael Hanley would give a thumbs up to old Beth Summerland getting some!

And that's when everything turned...sour.

Gordon gets up, goes into the bathroom and shuts the door.

Time passes. Too much time.

I put on my robe and walk down the hall to see if he's okay.

I worry that he may have snuck out the window. No such luck.

The sound is unmistakable. Gordon Ukovich, the stockbroker, is throwing up.

I immediately believe I'd poisoned him with my dinner.

I feel horrible. But then he emerges, smiling.

And he explains.

He named the syndrome, I can't recall its exact name.

But Gordon Ukovich cannot make love unless he vomits first.

It's not you, Beth, he said. It's everybody.

I should have said something, he said. But don't worry, I'm okay now. Are you ready, Beth?

No...I was not.

Two weeks later I'm on the West Coast, in Montecito, covering the annual flower show. I'm standing beside an older woman and the two of us are admiring the yellow roses.

The woman introduces herself as Virginia Cherrill. We immediately take to one another and she invites me to

her home on Ashley Road the following afternoon for tea.

When I arrive, I am led to the backyard where I see the most beautiful rose bushes!

After about an hour, Virginia and I decide to adopt each other.

Since she's never had children, it's decided I shall become her godchild, and she my godmother. We figured it beat dating!

Even more interesting, I am introduced to Father Virgil Cordano, an old friend of Virginia's, who inquires as to where I was baptized. It's so funny, I tell him, I'd been meaning to get baptized one day.

So there we were, Virginia, Father Cordano and myself, beside the marble fountain in her backyard, under the rose trellis with the pretty yellow roses on a bright April afternoon.

And I was baptized in the fountain.

I felt reborn.

And for the next eight years, Virginia and I spoke often on the telephone and we exchanged a great many letters.

I would make it a point to stop in Santa Barbara whenever I was out West, and my godmother would have the guest room set up for me. Always with roses from her garden.

Early on, Virginia made me promise that if ever I were to marry, the ceremony would be held in her rose garden.

Of course I agreed, although things were not looking too promising on the wedding front.

My godmother's descriptions of her European adventures were so vivid that I felt as if I'd been on them myself.

Virginia Cherrill instilled hope in an often hopeless world.

I'm not sure why she didn't like your books. To me, they inspire nothing but hope. Your stories, when they

are over, make me miss things that never happened in the book itself.

I miss, desperately, what so clearly has yet to occur.

I see this as hope.

I told Virginia I had a crush on you. She confided that she still loved Cary Grant, although their marriage was brief.

One day in June...June fourteenth to be exact, this was two years ago, I was in Los Angeles covering a trade show and thought I'd rent a car and drive to Santa Barbara and surprise my godmother.

It was a Sunday and a "For Sale" sign had been placed on the front lawn.

I'd not heard from Virginia in almost three months and was horrified to learn why.

The realtor, Naomi Norton, was very sweet. She represented the Cherrill Family Trust, which more or less consisted of Benjamin, Virginia's nephew.

But she knew all about me.

She knew about me because it was stipulated in Virginia's will that any subsequent owner of her house must agree that Beth Summerland be permitted to marry in her backyard -- beside the roses.

That afternoon, I began a tradition that continues to this day.

Whenever I am on the West Coast, I make it a point to visit Santa Barbara, if only for a few hours.

I travel to Ashley Road and sneak up the side of Virginia's house. I take pruners with me. When no cars are passing by, I clip a few yellow roses and then head towards the Santa Barbara Cemetery.

There's a bronze flower holder attached to the wall, to the left of the name Virginia Cherrill.

I know she's smiling as I place the roses from her garden in the holder.

I usually, at that moment, picture the two of us together in Paris in the late Twenties. In my dream, Virginia and I are the same age. We're young women gallivanting about Bohemian Paris!

Then I'll walk outside and look at the ocean, towards the Channel Islands.

Then, I'll turn toward the mountains, in the direction of Virginia's old house.

I won't stand there looking too long.

Usually, I'll have a cab waiting to take me to the airport as I did today.

Even though I'm standing in the middle of Santa Barbara Cemetery, I feel as I do when I finish one of your books.

I feel hope. Hope for a better life, for myself and for the world around me.

How oddly wonderful that Virginia Cherrill, who portrayed the blind flower girl who gave roses to Charlie Chaplin for all the world to see, would now, more than seventy years later, have Beth Summerland bringing flowers to her.

I'm afraid I miss my godmother terribly, Mr. Hanley.

5-A. THE MAN:

Novels are supposed to be like children.

Their completion is supposed to be like birth.

What a load of crap.

I was in the delivery room when Jeffrey was born and it was a far different experience than finishing a novel.

I must say I'm fond of my son, and all of my books.

All except "The Bicycle Approach." It sounded good at the time it was written.

How could my father have done it?

How could a father place his three-year-old son on a bicycle and push him down a steep hill? You'll either start peddling or you'll fall, he said. That's how life works, he said.

I didn't fall. So what, I didn't fall.

Adversity builds character, my father said.

My father, who wanted to build character, would lock me in closet.

For no reason. Because he could.

Nowadays such actions lead to arrest.

My mother put up with a lot from my old man.

Before she died, before she fell "suddenly ill," as we would tell people, she would tolerate his moods.

I've always wondered how differently things would have turned out had my mother not died so early. Would I have siblings?

Brothers and sisters to tell me how to live my life?

I never treated Jeffrey in such a manner.

I always told him to be anything he wanted. Some fathers do that, yes. But others, like mine, they say, "I didn't have it easy, so neither will you!"

If the Rockefellers did it that way, each generation would start from scratch.

I wanted to be nothing like my father.

I told him one day, before I moved out, that my intention was to be a writer.

He just sat there and said nothing.

Then he laughed and said that writing is a lonely profession.

Well, my father said, at least you're not claustrophobic.

I've never ridiculed my son. Jeffrey is a good boy.

Jeffrey never speaks of his mother running off on us.

Off to the Virgin Islands to "find herself."

Her friends assured me it was a phase.

Leaving her husband and three-year-old son was a phase.

A phase that has lasted twenty-four years!

Jeffrey never speaks of it. Not ever.

His mother came to his high-school graduation. The biggest day of Jeffrey's life, up to that point, and his mother shows up. Unannounced.

She must have "found" herself.

Jeffrey is very happy with his girlfriend.

He doesn't say much, but he's made one thing quite clear: Jeffrey never wants to be left.

Neither Jeffrey nor his father want to be left.

Not ever!

I could have done without "The Bicycle Approach."

Silly book.

Not my best work.

To write as I do, about love and hope -- and faith -- people think I must have had good role models.

People who taught me values.

What is it that's really of value?

Marriage, perhaps?

Could Michael Hanley get married again?

Excellent question.

She'd have to never leave me.

She'd have to never leave my son.

5-B. THE WOMAN:

You once said in interview that as a writer you had no opinions and that you had no intention of saying anything whatsoever on any given subject, that you greatly admired philosophers, or mathematicians, anyone from the world of ideas.

That you yourself had done nothing but notice certain things and interpret what you'd noticed, but that never, never in a million years, had your writing shown

any tendency or inclination to enter the world of ideas.

You said in this interview that ideas about the world were, strictly speaking, of no value in the practice of literature.

Sheer hypocrisy.

I've never found anything in any of your books which doesn't express in a completely personal way your view of the world.

Even your energy is a view of the world.

Your attraction to nuance is a view of the world.

Your disinclination to do the simple thing is a view of the world.

Reading your interview, I finally grasped something unexpected: your fear of being understood, Mr. Hanley. You cover your tracks, you personally invent protective misunderstandings, because you're haunted by the fear of being understood.

A judicious helping of impenetrability is how you avert this great misfortune and preserve your prestige intact.

You continually mention a distaste for the "here and now."

In "Hopeless Romantic," which is in my handbag, your hero, your alter ego, claims he only wanted to be in a position of authority in order to be able to abdicate.

When are you, my dear writer, planning to abdicate?

I see no signs of abdication anywhere. Not in your flirtatious isolation and not in those immoderately offhand comments you squeeze out about yourself.

And certainly not in your writing.

In "Hopeless Romantic," you don't for one second give up any of the illusions of the human race.

If ever a man was far from giving them up, it's you, my poor old thing.

It's absurd to feel intimidated by you.

Really ridiculous...

"Mr. Hanley, chance, wonderful chance -- or rather, chance, quite simply -- chance has decreed that I should meet you at this airport...I can't resist telling you..."

And what are you going to tell him?

How will you fight your way up from that kind of affection?

"Mr. Hanley, I'm prepared, here and now, to hop on a plane and journey with you to the ends of the Earth."

Just to see his face, I should do it.

If he laughs, if his face lights up and he genuinely laughs, then he's the man I think he is.

Come on, Beth, life is short.

And what if he doesn't laugh?

If he doesn't laugh, then he's not the man you think he is.

You'll have to face the bitter reality that you've barked up the wrong tree for half your life.

Then you'll be so ashamed, you'll run to the ladies room and stay there until you know he's gone.

You'll miss your flight and be forced to stay the night.

Tomorrow, prior to your departure, you'll pay a visit to the cemetery and confess the blunder to your godmother.

You'll be forever changed. Your reality, your world, will be rocked.

And what if he genuinely does laugh?

You're not making this easy, Mr. Hanley.

6-A. THE MAN:

Twenty more minutes, thirty at the most, I should be on the plane.

Strange this woman doesn't read anything.

A woman who doesn't read anything, not even a beauty magazine. Or a newspaper.

No more books for me.

Perhaps I should write for the theatre?

God, no!

How could it even cross my mind!

Just what I need, another venue in which to jerk myself off.

I can't stand the theatre.

I can't stand the people who attend the theatre.

The way they laugh in that fake, deathly way.

Laughter congratulating itself for being intelligent enough to know why it's being laughed.

A little "in" laugh in several stages.

And over nothing!

A man says to his wife, thank you, dinner was delicious. The wife says, isn't it always? And the audience -- hahahahaha.

Or, the telephone rings, and the man says, when will that damn phone ever stop ringing? And -- hahahahaha.

You did what, you misplaced your keys again?

Hahahahaha.

Blowhards paying eighty dollars a ticket to impress their dates and laugh about nothing.

If you ask me, those people are the show.

Will anyone ever have the courage to admit hating
"Measure for Measure?" I'd prefer watching Barbara
Walters than to ever have to endure another production
of "Measure For Measure."

Maybe I could grow flowers like my mother. She had a
small greenhouse in our backyard and would grow
orchids.

She would give them away. Never would my mother charge
money for them.

Some say that having a green thumb is genetic.

I should construct a greenhouse, that's what my son
tells me.

Jeffrey tells me I'd be much happier if I had a garden.
Said he'd help me take care of it.

Jeffrey says I've spent all my life alone in a room and
now it's time to go outside.

Orchids in the greenhouse, and perhaps roses outside.

I would give them away, like my mother.

My oldest friend Gene Lees doesn't care for my latest
book.

My last book.

Is there today one single person in the whole world who just might understand "Hopeless Romantic?"

6-B. THE WOMAN:

My friends no longer attempt to fix me up.

Now, they just try to fix me.

Me, the Queen of Blind Dates. The World's Oldest Living Bride-to-Be.

I'm really not all that fussy.

Wary, yes, but my standards have dropped considerably.

From whatever they once were, I can't quite remember.

One day, Mr. Hanley, I drafted our wedding invitation.

I was working at my computer and the idea just popped into my head.

With all due respect to you, I decided to keep my maiden name, and add Hanley with a hyphen.

Elizabeth Summerland-Hanley. So as to maintain my own identity and not jump head-first into yours. You must get that a lot.

Unless of course you object. Which I doubt you will. Elizabeth Summerland and Michael Hanley invite you to share in the joy of their marriage, on Sunday, June whatever, at one o'clock in the afternoon. Reception to follow. Simple. We can work on the menu together. You will love my godmother's garden, Mr. Hanley.

Okay...Michael. I'll invite my sister, Jill, she hates everybody, so don't take it personally, she's studying to be a therapist.

And I have thirteen friends, I call them my baker's dozen, and a few aunts and cousins.

If someone doesn't wish to travel to Santa Barbara, they can kick rocks, as they say.

You will like my friend, Charlotte. We were born on the same day. She's a divorce attorney who was once married to the governor of Alaska. Bill Clinton hit on her at a fundraiser.

Anyway, Charlotte is very suspicious of everything, and she's also an insomniac. Just like your character Holtan from "Hopeless Romantic." Very much like him.

I pointed this out to Charlotte and she didn't see it.

In reality, my friend Charlotte is one of your characters.

I wonder, if they were to read you, would your characters like you?

Let's imagine Holtan reading "Hopeless Romantic."

I'd say he'd get impatient after about two pages!

Also, I should let you know that my friend Charlotte is a hypochondriac.

After she dies, she told me, "I don't want a single word spoken at my funeral. Be so good as to be there to check."

I asked about music and suggested Debussy, but Charlotte said that would be too romantic, so Debussy was nixed.

Between you and me, should Charlotte die before me, I will play "Claire de Lune" at her funeral. It would be a sweet departure.

We would have a nice life together, Mr. Hanley.

A very nice life.

7-A. THE MAN:

To think, all those years, and I knew nothing about Debussy.

Thirty years without hearing a note of Debussy.

I got through "Claire de Lune" all right the day before yesterday.

For Mrs. Balian to suggest "La Cathedrale engloutie," she must have been impressed by the progress I've made.

Good idea to take up the piano again.

There's been a maturing...a mental leap forward...

My son likes that I take piano lessons. Says I've been "too closed off."

It's true I'm ready to attempt "La Cathedrale engloutie."

There are two reasons behind my progress.

First, I'm getting better and better at sight reading.

Thanks to Bach, I've gotten used to a strong, quick left hand, which compels you to anticipate.

And secondly, I've succeeded in hearing myself. Easy enough to hear other people play. It's hearing oneself, that's what's difficult.

And I've always had a feeling for Schumann. Now that I've matured.

"Vogel als Prophet," that's what I must play. That'll be my next piece.

Or I could paint. No. Too many actors and writers and singers who abdicate decide they're the next Van Gogh. Quite embarrassing, if you think about it.

Tennessee Williams the painter.

Tony Bennett the painter.

If I were a painter, I'd draw this woman's face.

It's an interesting face.

A lonely face.

A kind face.

The face of a woman who might fire the imagination.

7-B. THE WOMAN:

When my friend Charlotte said to me not to play anything that seemed too romantic, I laughed.

She said, how can you laugh?

She said, don't you remember telling me not to let them put your age in the paper if you die?

So which of us is more frivolous?

Frivolous beyond the grave, are we.

How to accept that somebody we loved is dead.

How to accept that the world contains one less person to love us...

My parents are gone.

My former fiancé, gone nearly thirty years.

So many friends, dead.

Virginia, dead.

How to accept never being in control of time or loneliness.

It was a good idea to have my hair done before I left.

Last time Daisy made it too dark, but this time she's done it well. I told her to make the silver strands disappear.

And I was right to wear my lavender dress. I needn't have worried I'd be cold in it, and it gives me an air of mystery.

If that idiotic writer were to glance over in my direction, he would see me at my best.

At least that's some satisfaction.

Do you think man hasn't changed since the Stone Age? I'm dying to ask you that question. Do you really think, as you maintain in "Hopeless Romantic," that man's knowledge is the only thing about him that's evolved?

It's not your invention, the theory that knowledge makes no difference.

Of course it isn't, but you develop it with so much cynicism.

Your outlook can be so cynical.

If I insist on talking to you about Charlotte -- even though it's in secret -- it's because in my mind there are so many ways the two of you are connected.

One day I'm watching the news on TV and the President announces the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Fine, my friend Charlotte said, yes, so what. Its coming down won't improve the behavior of mankind.

Deep down I wonder if there wasn't a touch of jealousy in her antipathy towards you. It must have annoyed her that I kept unearthing her character and her thoughts in your books.

Charlotte was always excessively cynical, like Holtan, and like you.

An attractiveness essentially based on character flaws.

I was feeling so low when I packed last night.

Do men ever suffer that kind of low?

Still felt sad this morning.

Sad at the cemetery.

I miss my parents.

I missed my former fiancé for the longest time.

A woman who sneaks onto her godmother's former property to snatch roses and bring them to the cemetery, with nothing else to read but "Hopeless Romantic," is a deeply depressed woman.

One day I'd like someone to explain to me why sadness always catches you by surprise, when everything seems under control.

What the hell, I'm taking out the book.

Screw him, I'm taking out the book, placing myself so he can see me, and reading.

He can't not react.

He can't watch me embarking on an intimate relationship with him six feet away without revealing himself.

What were you doing in Santa Barbara?

The Writer's Conference? No, a writer with your nature, flirtatiously anti-social, doesn't turn up at the Writer's Conference.

Wouldn't be caught dead there.

So what can you be doing here?

Are you here to meet me?

Oh, God, make him speak to me!

8-A. THE MAN:

What was she doing in Santa Barbara?

Didn't see her at the Writer's Conference, that's a plus. I would have noticed for sure.

This woman in the lavender dress.

I like her. This woman who doesn't read.

Not a good sign.

Plus anybody I find remotely attractive is having mad, passionate sex with someone else.

Usually a man.

Has she visited a relative?

A work assignment?

No wedding ring, so there's no husband. A lover, yes.

In the banking industry. Excellent.

On her way home from a tryst.

I like her.

A woman who does not commit easily.

A woman who knows what she wants and is not afraid to get it.

Should I approach her?

What would I say?

The Bicycle Approach.

[He speaks to her:]

Please, excuse me, do you
know if it's supposed to
rain tonight? Have you heard...?

8-B. THE WOMAN:

No, I haven't heard, but
I don't think so.

[Back Into Monologue]

You answered my prayer!

Such a trivial prayer and you answered it.

Listened to a couple of insignificant words which could have no possible bearing on the higher course of time and tide.

Oh, God, have I ever once prayed to you without asking for a favor?

Maybe I ought not to get to know you, Mr. Hanley.

Suppose I don't like you? Why take the risk of no longer being able to love you?

I'm told there isn't necessarily an intimate link between a man and his work.

But how can that be possible?

No. Not in your case, my dear. You can't write love stories, and characters as you do, in a disconnected state.

I should have...I should have said something to keep the conversation going. What a fool! I was caught by surprise.

Now he's sunk back, deep in his thoughts.

What a dimwit I am.

However, now I have a perfect right to break the silence as well.

Even if I only do it once.

But what would I say?

I need something appropriate, not heavy. I don't want to make him think I'm a nut. Or worse -- an obsessed fan.

What leads from the rain? Not the best starting point.

9-A. THE MAN:

An intellectual. I knew it.

You can tell by the voice. Very affecting.

The voice of a well-read person.

A hint of strangeness.

Her lover's a pilot. Why not?

Not a banker, but a pilot. About to fly.

She's taking the flight to Denver is my guess.

He takes her places, as she likes to travel, and surprises her with gifts to divert her attention from his other affairs.

Deep down she knows this, but takes comfort from his company nonetheless.

Pilots are slimy creatures.

He's a married pilot but claims his wife is terminally ill. He's her care-giver, he says.

She's in over her head and needs another man, an available one such as myself, to pluck her from his polygamous tentacles.

Yes, we could travel together.

Would such a thing be possible?

Of course it could.

Tomorrow, we could be in Buenos Aires, walking past art galleries, and we'll happen upon a painting which strongly resembles you, by some yet-to-be-discovered master. The painting is called "The Portraits and Dreams of Giovanna Alviste." In it, you're leaning forward slightly, three quarters in shadow, looking out a window at a blurred landscape with a bridge.

We both stop dead in our tracks at the gallery.

Because there on the canvas are your unmistakable features, your very particular eyes, gazing out in a distinctly watchful and supercilious way.

I buy the painting and tell you I'm going to keep it in my bedroom so I can contemplate you every day with complete impunity.

You laugh.

You laugh and try to remember who you were when you were Giovanna Alviste.

9-B. THE WOMAN:

I love traveling.

As soon as I set foot in Denver, I shall be another person.

The one who arrives is always another person.

And so it is that one progresses, from one person to the next, until it is over.

Mr. Hanley, you rested your eyes on me in a certain way. There was a question mark in your bright eyes. For a brief instant in your life, possibly imperceptible even to yourself, I'm sure I had some effect on you.

What was your question?

Whatever it is, the answer's yes!

Yes, it's me.

I'm the one who, secretly, one day, will make off with your world.

I'm the one. I'll make off with your light, your face, your happy hours or sad, the days and nights your name is written on...

I'm the one. The one who loved you, who colored you according to my inclinations, the one who studied every subject under your perpetual catechism.

I shall abolish you. I shall make off with you when my time is up, and nothing will remain of you or anything else.

That was my answer when you rested your eyes on me and spoke to me of rain.

10-A. THE MAN:

I've always regretted my moments of virtue.

All those "noble" gestures, after which I've always discovered some tainted reason for having made them.

Like showing up at Carrigan's Writer's Conference.

People keep talking to me about books I wrote thirty years ago!

I can't even remember what "The Last Room in Town" was all about. Seriously, I've no idea. Carrigan liked "The Last Room in Town," so did everybody else. Great. Obviously he re-read it a couple of weeks ago, so as far as he's concerned it's the present, Michael Hanley in the here and now, whereas for me it's a book written by somebody quite different.

There's some misunderstanding about time.

What we produce stagnates. Ossifies. Only plays an active part in other people's minds.

In time, what a man produces becomes what's furthest from him.

To start with, what's he doing reading "The Last Room in Town?"

Instead of, let's say, "Memoir Noir," which is far better.

Not to mention "Hopeless Romantic."

Which I actually would have disapproved of, because it's too recent.

All in all, I prefer that he dug up "The Last Room" rather than plunging into "Hopeless Romantic."

Plunging into "Hopeless Romantic" before we'd met to discuss it would have been the worst sort of blunder. Even by Carrigan's standards. And he doesn't set the bar all that high.

10-B. THE WOMAN:

Half a lifetime ago, when I was twenty-eight, Detective Ray Morowski entered my life.

A simple knock on the door that changed everything.

Twenty-eight years ago.

My fiancé had been murdered.

My lover had been murdered.

Daniel Reneer was dead.

Danny and I had met in Florida and fallen in love quickly.

He had just gotten his law degree and was studying for the bar exams in Florida and New York. His specialty was maritime law.

Danny's parents had a beautiful old cabin cruiser they kept in Boca Raton, and we'd spend weeks at a time on it, jumping from one Caribbean island to the next.

I was living in New York at that time, and we'd take turns visiting each other, him up from Florida one week, me down from Manhattan the next.

No motive was ever discovered for his death.

No suspects, either. An unsolved homicide.

I answered thousands of questions and racked my brain for two decades. Nothing. To my knowledge, Danny had not an enemy in the world and had never engaged in anything remotely illegal.

Even Detective Morowski came to believe this. He said it was a random act.

However, the manner in which my fiancé was -- murdered -- suggests that it was not a random act, or a case of mistaken identity at all.

Danny was tortured.

After that, his throat was cut.

Was there something I didn't know about Daniel Layton Reneer?

I wore his ring for several years.

Two weeks after the funeral, I realized I'd missed my period. That often happens under duress, my doctor said.

When I missed it again the following month, I had a test.

It was the middle of August, and I was two months' pregnant.

11-A. THE MAN:

Were I to marry this woman, I envision an elopement to a fishing town.

Fishing towns offer the best atmosphere for a wedding.

Perhaps Italy...Portofino?

No.

Perhaps Ibiza...no.

Faojose dos Campos, a hundred miles from Buenos Aires.

Yes. Very nice.

I hope she's not put off by my being a writer.

If so, I'll do something else. I'm retiring anyway, that's right.

The thought of spending the rest of my life with Giovanna Alviste has fogged my brain.

At my age, I could live without the dating part. No need for all that.

I will cook for you, Ms. Alviste.

I will make you a Spanish omelet such as you've never known before.

I will run your bath and leave secret notes for you around the house. Notes you may find right away or discover years later.

Notes that all say one thing: that your essence, your spirit, moves me.

I will hide my books should you find that part of my life overbearing.

Who says you have to like any of my books?

You're an artist, that's my thought.

I promise not to stifle your creativity.

I will not smother you with my politics, either.

I will, however, allow you to grow into the woman you wish to become.

That being said, of course you are perfectly fine just as you are.

"Oh, yes, Carrigan, this is my wife, Giovanna.

Giovanna, Carrigan..."

Take your little geisha, Richard Carrigan! Meet Giovanna Alviste!

11-B. THE WOMAN:

Danny and I had planned on children. He said our kids would encapsulate the sum total of the best of us.

So here I was, working in New York City at the Robert Sanders Gallery on Madison Avenue, and I'm expecting a baby in the spring.

A widow -- my friends referred to me as the Widow Summerland -- alone in Manhattan.

Mourning. Grieving. Expecting.

I had no relatives within two thousand miles, and my best friend, Charlotte, had moved to France for at least a year. Timing is everything, I told myself.

And mine was very much off.

I received little sympathy from anybody.

Some people were bold enough to express shock, even dismay, that I had chosen to keep the baby.

My baby.

I felt so alone.

Fortunately, I had a wonderful obstetrician.

Dr. Irving Weinstock was quite a compassionate man. He treated me as he would treat his own daughter.

One afternoon in October, having just come from my monthly check-up, I entered the Strand Bookstore, which was just two blocks from the doctor's office.

I'd had an ultra-sound and learned I was carrying a baby girl.

So many thoughts raced through my head as I picked my way through the dollar books on the remainder table.

I found a copy of "Memoir Noir" and quickly snatched it up. I should let you know that I always purchase copies of your books, because I'm forever lending them to people who never give them back.

A few weeks go by and it comes to me: the name of my baby comes to me.

Rachel. Yes, Rachel.

After the teenage girl in "Memoir Noir."

Of course I realized that projecting such expectations on to my little girl would result in a somewhat precocious child, and that I'd inevitably find myself chasing her all over the globe.

So be it.

I was excited about my new life with Rachel.

Spring could not arrive soon enough.

Then one afternoon, it was November seventh, I left the gallery early and took the subway uptown to look at a Chagall -- that turned out to be a fake, by the way.

I was hungry and saw a tiny Chinese restaurant across the street. I sat at a table by the front window, by

myself of course, and watched the people go by as I ate.

I ate a lot. I was eating for two, as they say, so it was okay.

I paid particular attention to women with strollers. That would soon be me.

Back at my apartment, I felt feverish and clammy. I was sweating and a bit dizzy and needed to lay down.

They used MSG in the food, that's what I thought.

Then it happened. I felt crampy. The cramps wouldn't go away.

I called Dr. Weinstock and his service put me through to his home on Long Island.

It was dinnertime.

I described my symptoms and the next thing I know, I'm in an ambulance heading back uptown, to Lennox Hill Hospital. They had me in the delivery room within minutes.

Dr. Weinstock had stayed on Long Island.

There would not be enough time for him to make it to the hospital.

They tried to stop the labor.

Gave me a cocktail of drugs.

Nothing worked. I was maybe five months pregnant and I was in labor.

In labor and almost fully dilated.

It happens rarely, but enough. If the labor cannot be halted, there is just no way the baby will live. The lungs have yet to fully develop. One more month, then maybe...

The nurses had a look of horror on their faces.

For a few minutes, the pains subsided and the labor seemed to decrease. If thoughts were words, I could hear a hundred prayers at once. The nurses, most of them mothers themselves, were rooting for me.

Then my water broke.

There would be nothing that anyone could do.

The drugs were stopped, and labor kicked in hard.

Within ten minutes, Rachel Summerland Reneer was in my arms.

Everybody left the room except one nurse.

Her name was Josie, she was from El Salvador and knew very little English.

But no words were needed.

Josie placed a tiny pink cap on Rachel.

I would hold my daughter for the next twenty minutes.

It would take that long, the doctor said, for her to stop breathing.

Then her little heart would stop, and my baby would wait for me in heaven with her father.

I looked at Josie, and she looked at me. Two women from different parts of the world, from different backgrounds, different families. My baby was dying -- we both understood and felt what words could never express.

The hospital has a procedure for disposing of a stillborn's remains. I would have no part of it!

Rachel was not a stillborn baby.

I insisted upon the issuance of a birth and death certificate, and had the Frank Campbell Funeral Home prepare my precious daughter for burial.

Nobody said anything, not my family, not my friends, not the people with whom I worked -- but they all thought I was crazy, I could tell.

Rachel would have been a Pisces.

Aquamarine would have been her birthstone.

Rachel and I would have been so good for each other!

Three days later, I took the ferry to Staten Island Cemetery. Her small white casket was already in place and a chaplain was on his way, they said.

I'd invited no one. The workers stood to the side, and after a while it was clear there would be no chaplain.

An obvious mix-up.

No matter. I opened my Bible to the twenty-third psalm and began to read, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall

not want," and so on. I read several other passages from the Bible and, after a half-hour or so, I was done.

Or thought I was.

It was windy and leaves were moving about us that day. I wasn't sure I could make it from the cemetery to my apartment. I was weak at the knees and cannot remember a time in my life when I felt so much sorrow.

As I placed the Bible in my handbag, I took out the copy of "Memoir Noir" I'd purchased at the Strand and turned to the page where the little boy reads from his dead mother's diary, in which she'd inserted a poem she had come across, a poem that had touched her.

And I read, to my daughter Rachel, and to myself, your words:

"The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.

You will love again the stranger who was your self.

Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored,
who knows you by heart.

Peel your own image from the mirror.

Sit. Feast on your life!"

I then wept for my daughter, and for myself, and left
her there that day and returned to my apartment to
savor what I'd lost and found of my own self.

I would indeed make it.

And for almost thirty years, I've wanted to thank you
from the bottom of my heart.

For being there that day and on so many others.

And now here you are, seated so close.

How could I ever begin to tell you, to express in words...

No...all that would come from my mouth would be: "I've been such a fan, Mr. Hanley. I've read every one of your novels, Mr. Hanley."

And you would smile, perhaps, and say thank you, ma'am. Then you would go about your life as before.

How could I ever tell you without putting you on the spot? Without putting you off?

That what you did...

My baby died, Mr. Hanley.

And it was you who soothed me.

12-A. THE MAN:

I suggest we forget all about flights to San Francisco and Denver and hop aboard the shuttle flight to L.A.

You and me, pretty lady.

Why not?

We're here already, luggage in tow.

I say let your womanizing pilot waste time with his little disciples, his bimbos, and let's you and I get on with things.

Are you up to such an adventure?

Shall I just surprise you, or may I offer a snippet of our impromptu itinerary?

Okay. We arrive at LAX, where we hop aboard the airport bus, which shall drop us at Varig Airlines.

My friend Martin, who works in the office behind the check-in counter, will have his friend Phillip arrange emergency visas for us.

We are seated, you and I, in the first-class cabin, sipping champagne and making a toast to our new life.

Upon arrival in Buenos Aires, we go on a shopping expedition and buy you a wardrobe befitting your engaging personality and new locale.

It's late morning and we've been up all night talking, playing catch-up with our lives. Neither one of us is tired.

With your Argentine wardrobe in your new set of luggage, we check into the hotel. Our room is on the seventeenth floor and overlooks the city.

Our first dinner together is in the room.

That lavender dress that looks so good on you now looks even better draped over the chair beside our bed.

The following day, no, perhaps two or three days later, we depart for a little fishing town, where we will eventually marry, called Faojose dos Campos.

I'll buy you an ice cream cone before we take our first boat ride. There will be many ice cream cones in our lifetime.

My son and his martini olive will fly down and everyone will be happy.

I'll watch as you take in the smells and sounds Faojose dos Campos and your new life.

Perhaps we'll move there.

Wherever we live, we will plant flowers.

Time is fleeting!

If we get on our planes and never meet, what is to be gained? Nothing.

To be lost? Everything!

"Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
longed for as the sun-warmed earth
is longed for by a swimmer
spent in rough water
where his ship went down.
Few men can keep alive in a big surf,
to crawl, in joy, in joy,
knowing the abyss behind.
And so she, too, rejoiced,
her gaze upon her husband,
her white arms round him
pressed as though forever."

Come with me, Giovanna Alviste.

Come with me, whoever you are...

12-B. THE WOMAN:

I have a sister, Jill, who lives in London. She's seven years younger than I am.

We keep talking about other people because we're made up of other people, don't you agree?

As a writer, you know that better than anyone.

My sister lives in London, in a handsome flat in the north end of town.

The hallway in her building is paved with white, beige and black flagstones.

She's been living in her building for fifteen years, and for fifteen years, my sister Jill has only stepped on the light-colored flagstones, alternating, according to a very precise and never varying formula, between white and beige.

Never, in fifteen years, has she stepped on a black flagstone.

And anybody with her is forbidden to step on the black flagstones, which are somehow more tempting than the others.

As you can imagine, this makes dating a man nearly impossible.

When my sister inadvertently passes the doorman, on whom she's never dared impose her ban, she closes her eyes so as not to witness his sacrilege.

She told me she was petitioning the Resident's Association to have him replaced because, and I quote, "he was an irresponsible man who, in defiance of all common sense, was pulverizing the chessboard."

My sister Jill, who is studying to be a therapist, is convinced that the world order depends on the flawlessness of her passage.

A world order which comprises all possible journeys, including, Mr. Hanley, ours in this waiting area of the Santa Barbara Airport.

And if, in turn, I am bold enough to finally address you, it will be because, in the great labyrinth of life, my sister or I, according to the rules, have somehow happened to stand on the correct stone.

Okay. Enough philosophizing.

We're beyond all that. Time for action.

I'm taking out the book.

[She takes "Hopeless Romantic" out of her handbag]

There. I did it.

The funny thing would be if he didn't even notice.

Come on, Beth. Employ a little cunning in the way you read.

Not too obvious, but obvious enough.

Discreet, but unmistakably strong on presence.

My heart is pounding.

Will he notice me?

I'm twelve-years-old again!

13-A. THE MAN:

How many times in my youth did I think, ah, when I'm sixty, there will be happiness -- calm -- no more pretense!

Now what's it look like?

Nothing's changed at all.

If we didn't care what people said to us, why would we struggle on in a profession which is at the mercy of outside opinion?

An old man completely exposed to the judgment of his contemporaries. Condemned, whatever he may say, to try to put a good face on it.

But for whose benefit?

She's reading.

Giovanna Alviste is reading...

...she's reading "Hopeless Romantic"!!!

Extraordinary...!

Where...what...what page has she got to?

Page...looks like page...120...?

Unbelievable...!

It is 120...Holtan's in the kitchen.

He's already met Swegles. She must have read the chapter about the counting mania. Or else she's in the middle of it and doesn't think it's funny.

No, this woman would be laughing, I'm sure of it. She must have gone past it.

You couldn't read about the counting mania without at least smiling.

She is smiling!

She's smiling!

She's in the middle of it!

Holtan meets Swegles who talks to him about his counting mania, which Holtan also secretly suffers from -- one of many things he suffers from.

Don't stare at her so insistently. You'll break her concentration.

Extraordinary...

She doesn't know who I am.

No, of course not.

She wouldn't just be innocently reading like that. She doesn't know who I am.

Why didn't she start reading when she got here? Lack of interest?

No. Just look at her expression.

And such a pretty face.

A pretty face for whose benefit? For whose benefit, my dear Hanley?

Why, for hers, for your unforeseen traveling companion, this silent woman sent to you by fate, the focus of your beseeching gaze.

She's reading "Hopeless Romantic."

It's really too much.

I knew she was an intelligent woman.

Shall I remain anonymous?

Why wasn't she reading it all this time?

Because she has things to think about.

In Denver, she's going to break up with the pilot.

The lying, cheating pilot who doesn't grasp a sliver of what she's all about.

She was thinking about methods of breaking up.

About turns of phrase to use when breaking up. In their relationship -- if you can call it that -- they've always weighed their words.

She's going to break up with the pilot, and "Hopeless Romantic" is the book she's chosen as witness to this moment.

I could speak to her. After all, this particular situation, it's the best ice-breaker there is.

No, it's the second best. Hugh Hefner claims that sexual intercourse is the number one ice-breaker.

I'll remain anonymous. I must.

But aren't I likely to feel some sort of bitterness?

Why deprive myself of a simple pleasure?

Because I'm a coward, that's why.

Isn't the benefit I might derive from this strange occurrence, by simply remembering it and passing it on to others, satisfaction enough?

No, it's not enough.

I have to reveal myself.

13-B. THE WOMAN:

I'm not kidding, Mr. Hanley. Before I go to my plane, before I leave this little world we currently share,

you will hear of my desire to travel with you -- and you will laugh, or at least smile -- that is, if you're the man I believe you to be.

I could not be wrong about someone I've felt I have known for almost thirty years.

What better place than an airport to tell you this?

And this section of your book...

"...As far as my daughter's concerned, Holtan, I consider myself unclean. I've always been afraid of infecting her. I was tidying up the kitchen when I spotted a slice of lime. I licked it. I like the taste, it reminds me of Mexico. I put it back on the table. I said to myself, you can't leave it there, contaminated, where anyone could pick it up. You can't throw it away, it cost you a dollar seventy-five, it's a lime, and right now they're out of season and hard to come by. So I bit into it and chewed it until it was ready to be thrown away. During these five minutes of oral acidity, I took the opportunity to tally up the number

of cupboard handles in the room, items which curiously enough I had never previously counted."

How strange that I was telling you about my sister.

This counting mania, as you call it, is exactly what my sister suffers from.

My sister is the victim of counting mania and, to that extent, she's also part of your universe.

What you write about is so familiar to me!

And you're so far away.

I've made a mistake, I'm afraid.

You're not going to speak to me.

There was a time, Mr. Hanley, when I had no need to get wrapped up in books and handbags and failures of nerve...

I was once beautiful and that spoke for me.

He's seen me.

He's watching me.

He's seen the book.

Here we go.

I didn't wear my lavender dress for nothing.

I didn't come to this airport for nothing.

Nothing's for nothing.

Can't you make this easy for me, Mr. Hanley?

Can't you speak to me?

Won't you just take me away with you?

14. THE MAN:

A famous author goes to the airport and finds himself seated opposite an unknown woman who's reading his latest book.

Good subject for a short story.

A bit old-fashioned.

Could have been written by -- by whom?

John Updike? No...it would have to contain the word rabbit.

Phillip Roth? Perhaps -- I always get those two confused.

Isaac Singer? Yes. Definitely. Isaac Bashevis Singer would be ideal. He was a crafty little devil.

The man's intimidated.

A man who prides himself on having outgrown such childishness is suddenly touched by the indelicacy of the situation.

The woman's attractive.

Actually, quite beautiful.

Would he be intimidated if the woman wasn't attractive?

If the woman wasn't attractive, he would withdraw into his distaste for what's called the public -- that breed never to be encountered.

Let's be honest. You've never done anything for no reason. You don't create in a void. You relish the attention!

You place messages in bottles and cast them into the sea, desperately hoping for a response.

To approach this woman is to experience the magic of possibility.

What to say.

When to say it.

The Bicycle Approach...

[He turns to her:]

Excuse me...

How would you account for the need to invent or dream up other lives and other situations?

Isn't it enough quite simply to exist?

What do you think?

THE WOMAN:

First of all, I don't know what you mean by "quite simply to exist."

There's no such thing as quite simply.

THE MAN:

That book you're holding. It just so happens I've read it as well --

THE WOMAN:

Oh, really?

THE MAN:

Do you like it?

THE WOMAN:

I'm not sure I can answer such a blunt question. You see, this is an author I've been close to for some time.

THE MAN:

You as well.

THE WOMAN:

You as well?

THE MAN:

For some time. Yes. What have you read?

THE WOMAN:

"The Bicycle Approach," ... "The Pink House on Banner Avenue," ... "First Comes Love," ... "The Last Room in Town," ... "Memoir Noir" ...

THE MAN:

Did you like "Memoir Noir?"

THE WOMAN:

Yes...very much. For me, it's the most moving. What about you?

THE MAN:

I remember it as being quite a personal book.

THE WOMAN:

Yes, that's what I'd say. Personal. It's supposed to be a fictional autobiography, but I doubt it was entirely made up. The author must have lived a good bit of it, particularly as a child, to have written such a personal book.

THE MAN:

Could be.

THE WOMAN:

And I'd also have to say the book was inevitable. It must have felt inevitable to the man who wrote it.

THE MAN:

You can't always write like that.

THE WOMAN:

No. I'm sure.

THE MAN:

You can only lay yourself naked once.

THE WOMAN:

Of course.

[pause]

THE MAN:

You don't want to talk to me about this book?

THE WOMAN:

I can't talk about it before I've finished it...

THE MAN:

Yes, you can. I mean, the ending is of no significance.

THE WOMAN:

Well...the book is written like all the others in that I miss the things that have yet to occur.

That, to me, is his art.

Especially in this book. It says the same thing to me as that painting. It's given me, once again, a nostalgia for what's never taken place. A nostalgia for what might happen.

THE MAN:

I see.

THE WOMAN:

Does it deal with anything else?

THE MAN:

Don't you find it irritatingly repetitious?

THE WOMAN:

Yes. But I never read him without being irritated.

He's a deeply irritating writer.

THE MAN:

He certainly is.

THE WOMAN:

You find him irritating as well?

THE MAN:

Yes. Extremely irritating. Are you going to Denver?

THE WOMAN:

Yes.

[Pause]

THE MAN:

He's an irritating writer and in my view a minor writer. You're quite wrong to interest yourself in him.

THE WOMAN:

Irritating, yes. Minor, absolutely not.

THE MAN:

He's a selfish little busybody who's never been able to turn a single moment into an eternity, which is the mark of a poet.

He writes about how things will be because the present tense scares him.

He's deathly afraid of the here and now.

He can't speak of death except cynically.

He complains about the crowd and the masses.

He's never known how to describe man's happiness, and the only sadness he can talk about is his own, about which he is maniacally and irritatingly repetitious! And if all that isn't enough, there's that sentence he pretends to envy in an elegy by Borges:

"On the other side of the door, a man made out of love, out of time, and out of loneliness has just been weeping in Buenos Aires for everything that is."

You see, Michael Hanley has never known how to weep for everything that is.

[Silence]

THE WOMAN:

Well -- I -- I think you're being very unfair...

But -- I don't believe you mean it, since you said all that with the kind of effrontery which implies the exact opposite.

In "The Last Room in Town," he sees a young, homeless woman in the subway. She is filthy, covered in debris

from head to toe. She's crying as she looks at a poster for the Miss America Pageant. She has slippers on her feet and her ankles are bruised and swollen. The author describes her feet, her slippers, the bruised and swollen skin, her attempt to straighten her hair in front of the poster as a train roars by -- her whole life so perfectly etched, in just five lines...

In "Memoir Noir," he talks about the little boy who hides at the top of the stairs in the dark hallway, trying to overhear the grown-ups in the kitchen below. When they speak of his mother's suicide, he quickly runs to his room and sits on the bed, his hands cupped over his ears. He rocks back and forth, and hums loudly, trying to drown out any more voices from downstairs.

And in "Hopeless Romantic," come to that, well already there's that elderly woman, Mrs. Badami, who has lunch by herself every Sunday at the Barnegat Light Hotel. She's an overweight widow, plastered with make-up, her hair is dyed red and she wears her best lavender dress.

She brings candy to pass out to the children who arrive with their parents after church.

Yet, behind her back she is sneered at and ridiculed by everybody.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Badami is described as "a most tender soul...as kindness itself."

Oh...there have been hundreds of moments like eternity...

Moments that have made me weep...moments that have soothed me and helped me to feel whole again...

Moments that have provided hope, for myself, for the world, and for all living things.

And that is why -- Mr. Hanley -- that is why I have loved you ...

And that is why in another life -- and I say "in another life" so as not to embarrass you in the "here and now" -- I would have dropped everything, on a moment's notice, and journeyed with you to the ends of the Earth...

[THE MAN slowly turns towards THE WOMAN. After a moment, he smiles. And then ... together ... they laugh!]

LIGHTS FADE.

THE END